

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLAN

2020-2024

Updated June 2021

Foster and Adoption Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) remains committed to recruiting and retaining potential resource and adoptive families who reflect the cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of children in out-of-home care. As a result, DCF has developed a comprehensive recruitment and retention plan that supports strategies that are child focused, data driven, customer service centered, collaborative, inclusive of the voice of families and youth, and sustainable. This comprehensive plan also continues to support DCF's substantial conformity with the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) systemic factor: *Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention*.

The COVID-19 public health emergency has had a tremendous impact on New Jersey as well as all facets of DCF operations. This included the necessary suspension of recruitment activities beginning March 2020. The priority focus during the pandemic shifted from recruitment to the retention of existing resource and kin families in order to ensure that these families had necessary provisions to meet their needs and the needs of the children placed in their care.

As New Jersey begins to recover, recruitment strategies and activities will focus on the targeted populations described below.

Characteristics of Children Needing Foster and Adoptive Homes

Over the last several years, DCF has experienced great success with increasing and maintaining a robust pool of families that reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of children in care, and strives to remain adaptive and responsive to the needs of families and children. This, along with the focus on increasing the use of kinship placements, as outlined in NJ DCF CFSR Program Improvement Plan (PIP), has yielded a total of 3,590 resource homes with a bed capacity of 8,152 as of December 31, 2020. While this capacity exceeds the number of children in out of home placement, DCF identifies that there are targeted populations for which focused recruitment efforts need to be prioritized.

To ascertain how DCF should focus recruitment efforts, Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) data will continue to be analyzed to identify the age and race of children entering care in NJ.

In 2020, 1,664 children entered care. Figures 1 and 2 below depict the age and race breakdown of these children over a prior eight-year period.

Figure 1

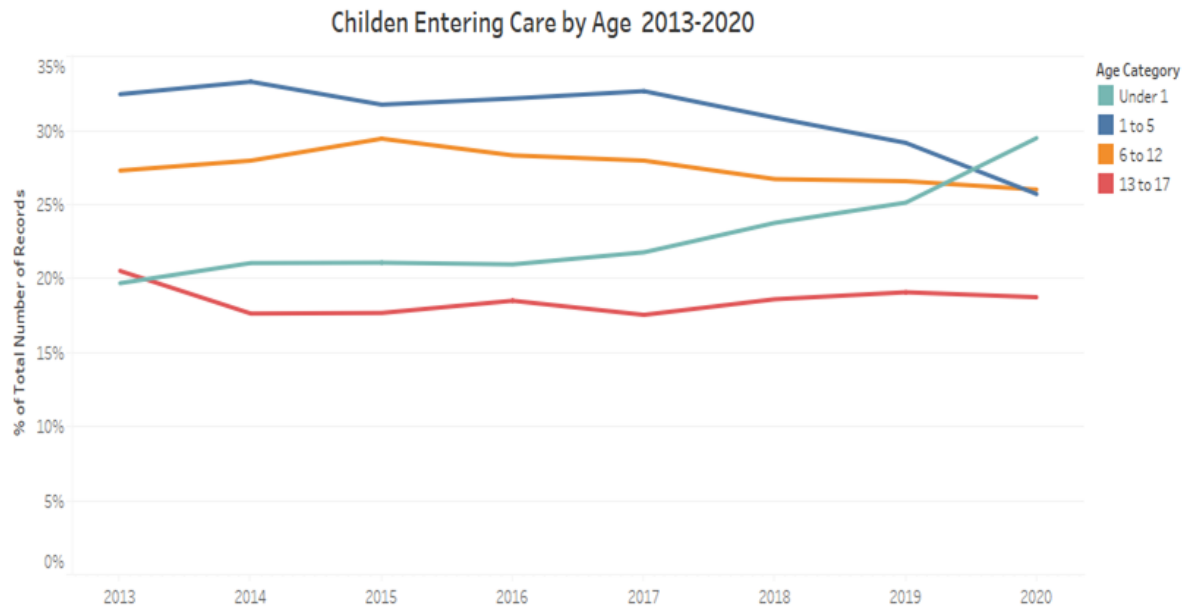
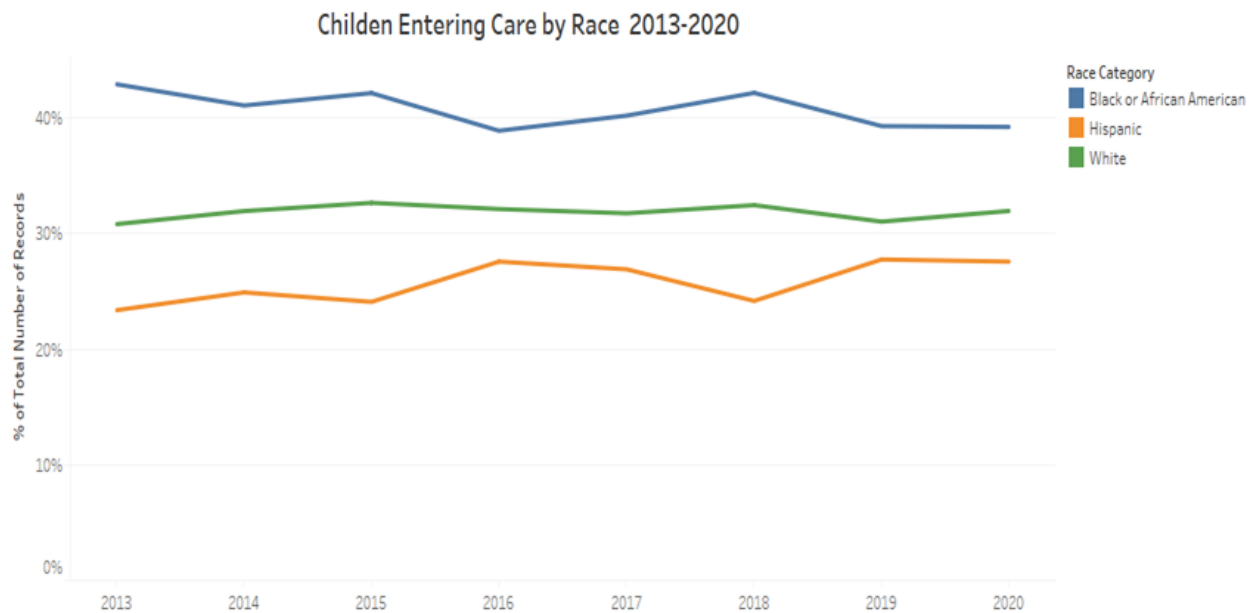


Figure 2



Further review of current point in time data related to New Jersey's pool of resource homes reveals DCF's performance regarding efforts to maintain a robust cadre of

resource homes that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children entering care. Figures 3-8 below offer further insight to these diverse resource homes.

Figure 3

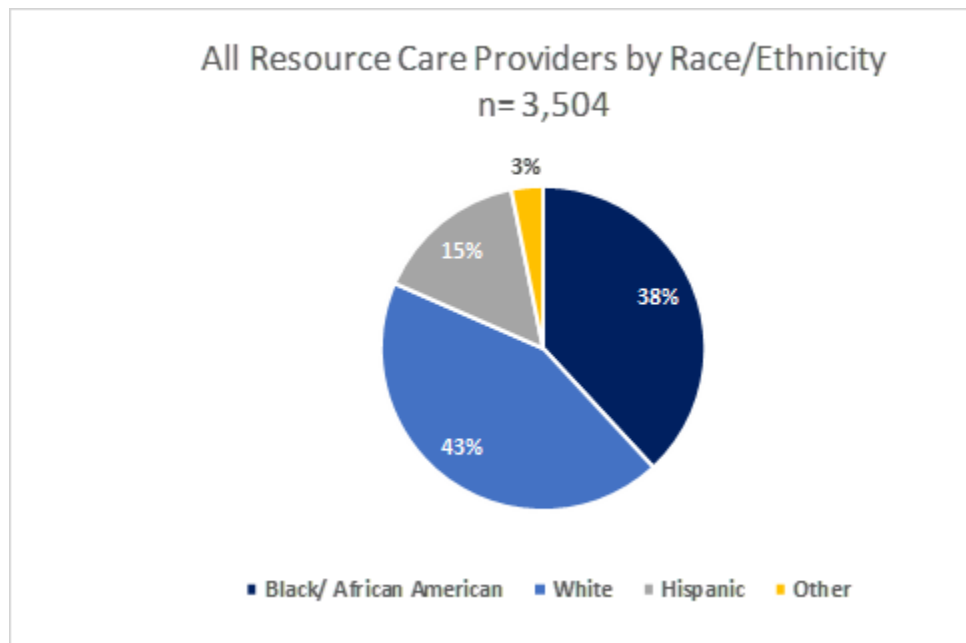


Figure 4

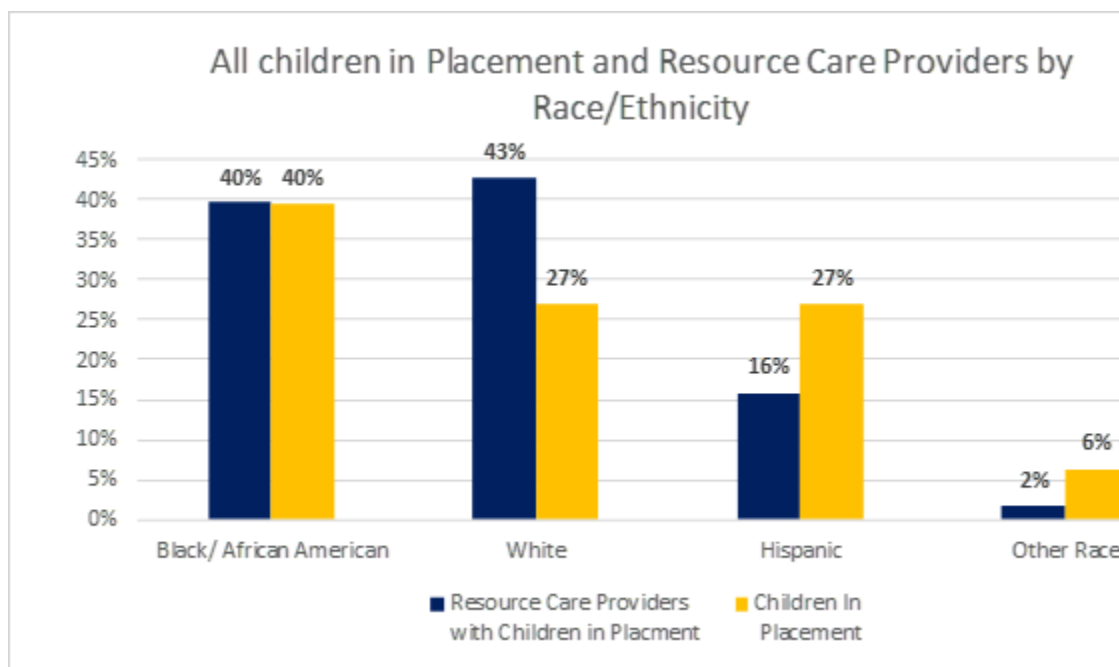


Figure 5

All children in Placement and their Resource Care Providers by Race/Ethnicity		
Race	Resource Care Providers with Children in Placment	Children In Placement
Black/ African American	40%	40%
White	43%	27%
Hispanic	16%	27%
Other Race	2%	6%
n	1,502	3,723

Figure 6

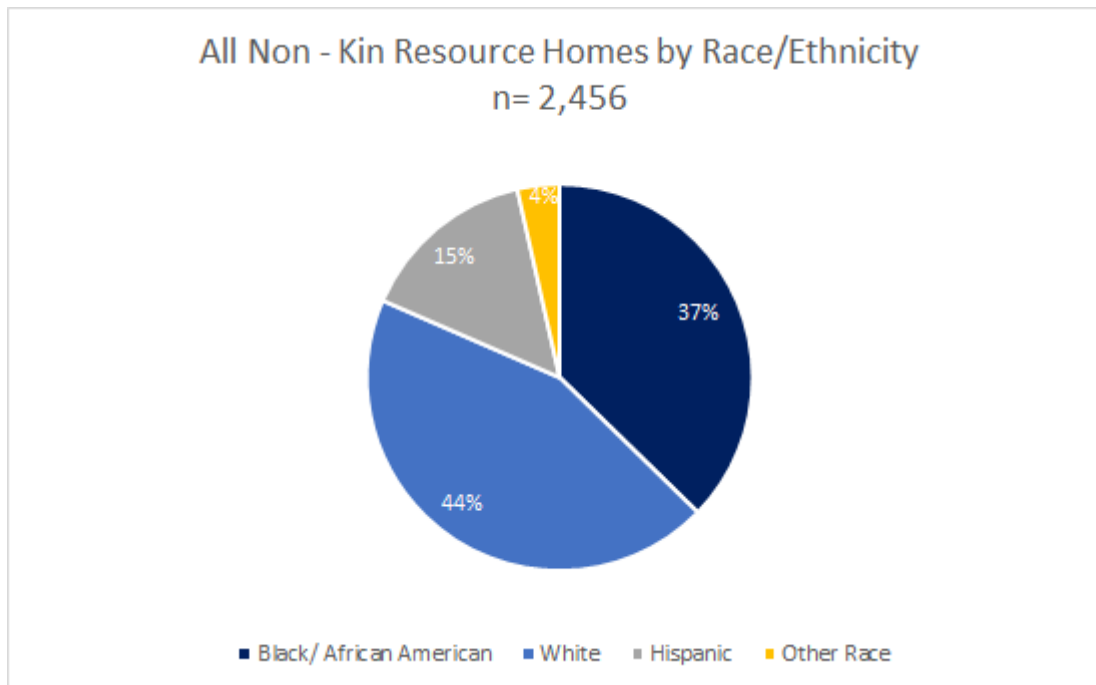


Figure 7

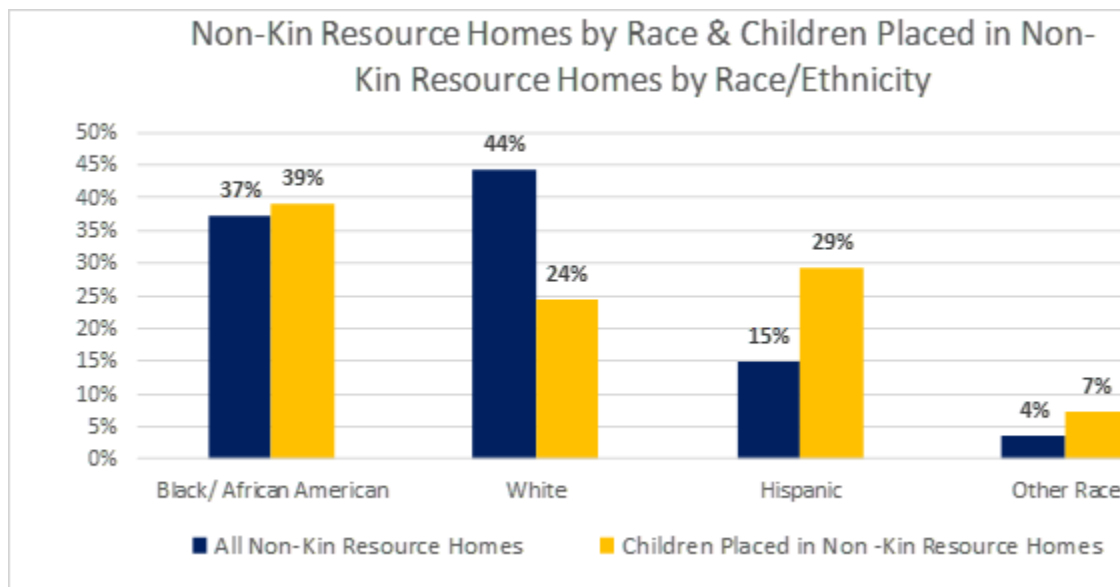


Figure 8

Non-Kin Resource Homes by Race & Children Placed in Non-Kin Resource Homes by Race/Ethnicity		
Race	All Non-Kin Resource Homes	Children Placed in Non-Kin Resource Homes
Black/ African American	37%	39%
White	44%	24%
Hispanic	15%	29%
Other Race	4%	7%
n	2,456	1,721

DCF also places a focus on recruitment and licensure for special populations. These focus populations are identified through data review and include sibling groups, adolescents, and children with complex medical, developmental, and behavioral health needs. Updated details regarding these populations and recruitment targets are described below.

Sibling Groups

DCF recognizes the importance of sibling connections for all children in particular children experiencing an out-of-home placement. DCF works to ensure that sibling groups entering placement remain intact.

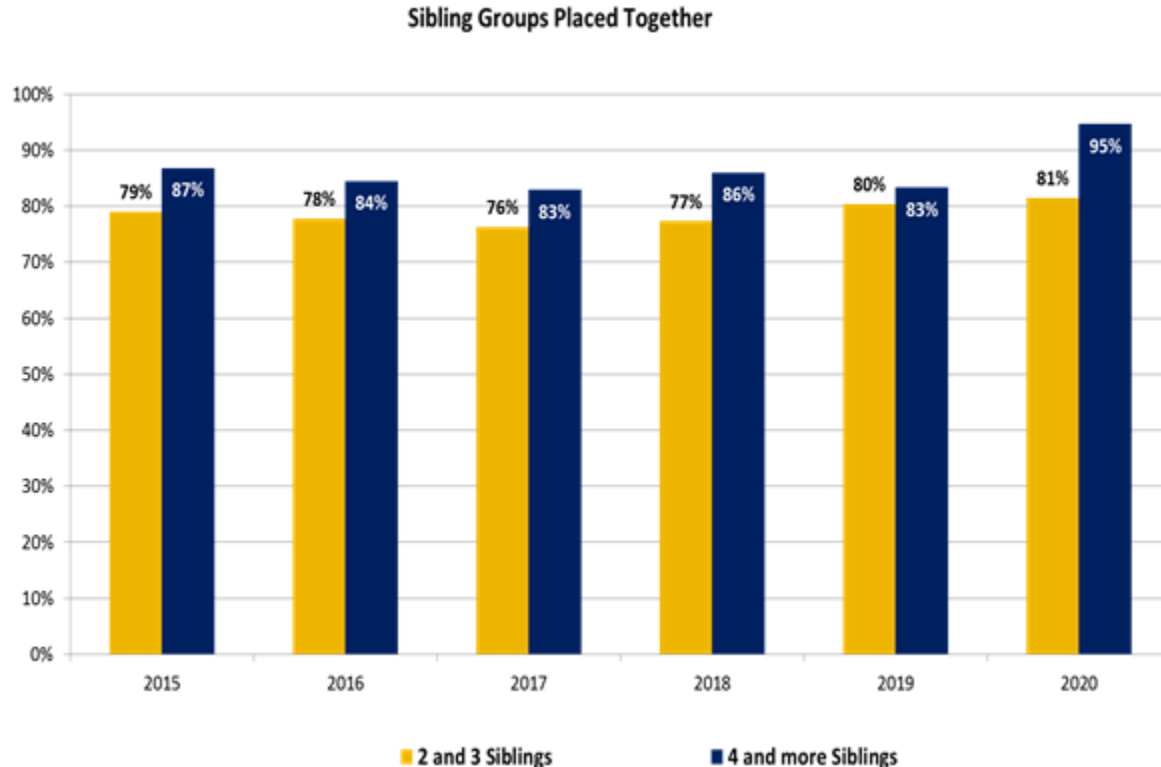
In an effort to address the need to recruit and retain resource homes willing to accommodate large sibling groups entering placement, DCF continues to implement the Siblings in Best Settings (SIBS) Resource Family Homes initiative, which seeks to recruit homes willing to take large sibling groups of four or more. Strategies include enhanced board rates and retainer fees to maintain homes vacant for the placement of large sibling groups. In 2020, DCF acquired a total of 28 new SIBS homes for a total of 55 in December 2020. Of these 55 homes, 12 are able to accommodate five or more children while 43 homes can accommodate up to four children. The decrease in the number of new SIBS homes recruited for 2020 can be attributed to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DCF continues to use data driven tools to identify sibling placement needs on a local level to ensure targeted recruitment in those areas. DCF promulgates monthly reports that forecast the need for targeted recruitment of resource homes willing to provide care to sibling groups. This data assesses the need at a local level to support children remaining in their community with their siblings when kin placement is not an immediate option.

DCF strives to place at least 80% of sibling groups together. In 2020, 81% of sibling groups of two or three were placed together and 95% of children from a sibling group of four or more were placed with at least one other sibling. While DCF met its goal for both sibling categories, DCF will continue efforts to ensure that siblings remain together when family separation is needed.

In total, there continues to be approximately 300 families, including the 55 SIBS homes, identified to provide a home for a sibling group of three or more. DCF will strive to increase the number of sibling homes by 20% by 2022. This will be in line with DCF's strategic priority to increase the number of children placed safely with kin, as well as to ensure that new, unrelated homes are recruited to maintain capacity.

Figure 9



Adolescents

DCF identified an ongoing need to recruit and retain a robust pool of resource homes for the adolescent population. In 2020, 1,664 total children entered out of home placement of which 312 were ages 13 to 17.

In 2020, 31% of the 312 children placed between the ages of 13-17 were initially placed in kinship care, compared to 27% in 2019. DCF also saw that more children in this age population were placed in an unrelated family setting, or non-kinship care - 39% compared to 37% in 2019.

As placement in family type settings increase, DCF saw a decrease in congregate care placement for this population, from 36% in 2019 to 29% in 2020. Further analysis of congregate care placements also shows a decrease in emergency shelter placements from 25% in 2019 to 21% 2020.

Figure 10

Children Entering Care by Age- CY2020	
0-5	919
6 to 12	433
13 to 17	312
Total	1,664

Figure 11

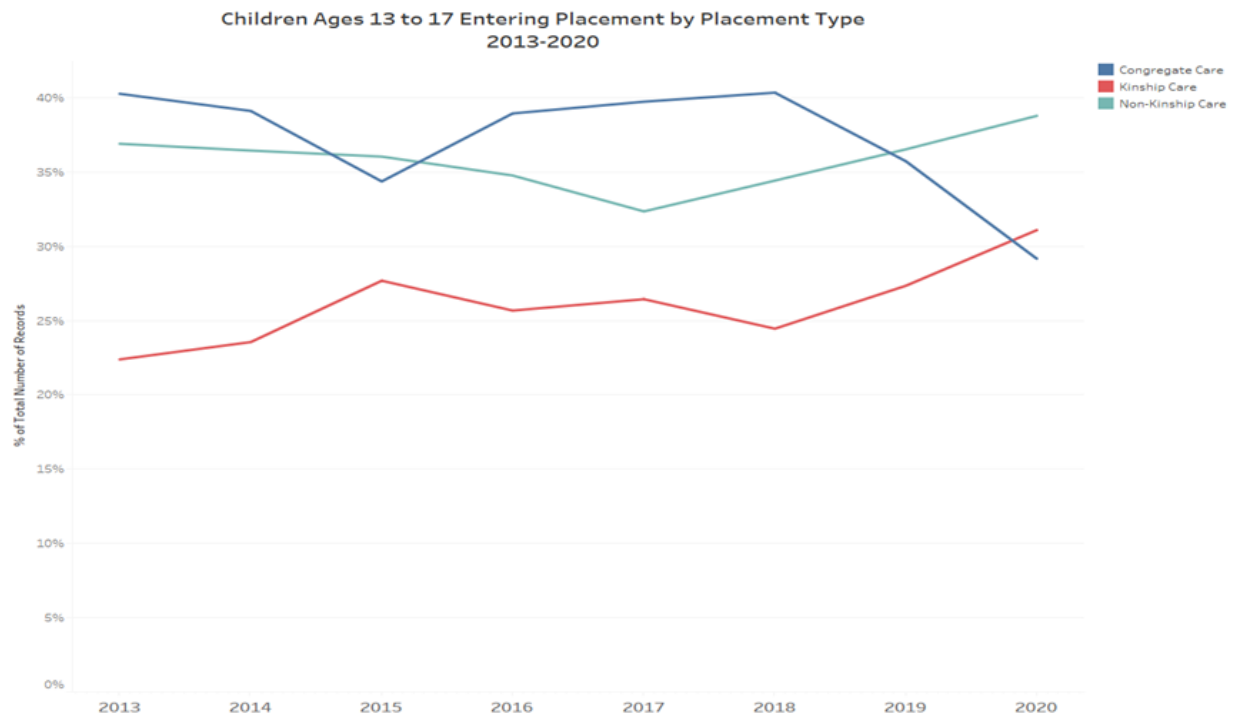
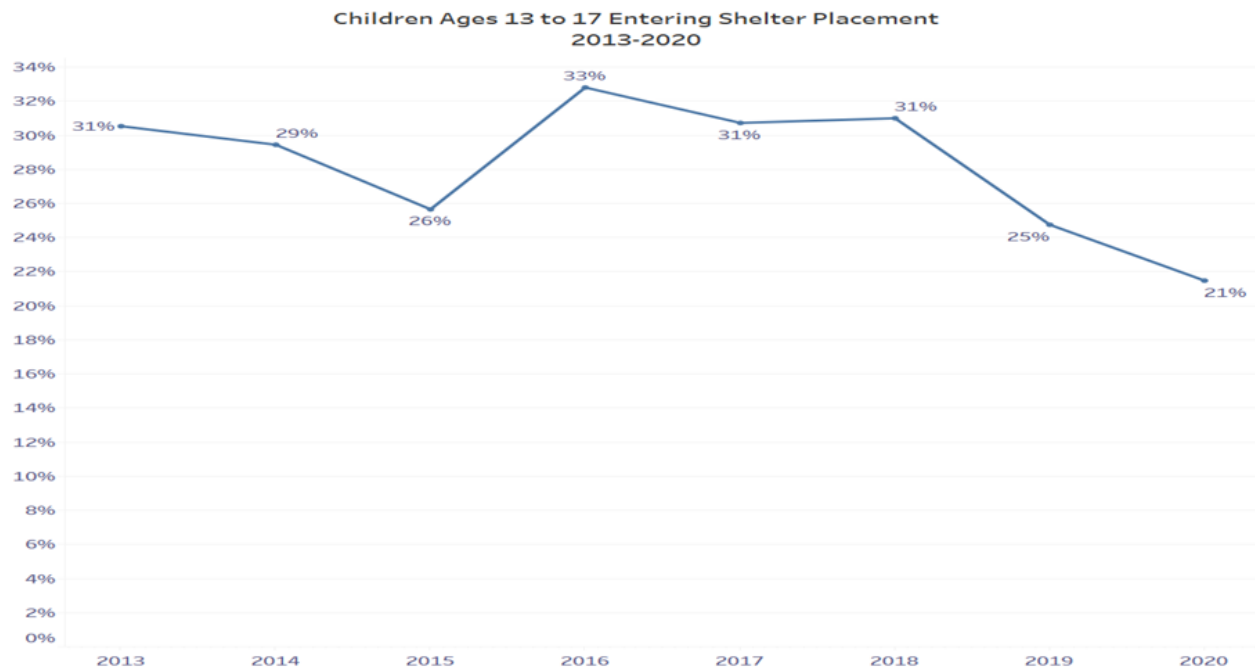


Figure 12



DCF's recruitment goal is to increase adolescents in kin care by 30% by 2022¹. DCF also had a recruitment goal to increase the capacity of non-kin families who are able to serve adolescents by 15% during the same time period, in an effort to prevent unnecessary shelter placements. Further analysis of the 65 children placed in shelter revealed that the majority, 44 children, exited from out of home care. Of the 21 who remained in care, five were discharged into an unrelated resource home and two were discharged into a relative resource home. The remainder required a higher level of care, suggesting that the majority of adolescents who enter shelter placements require a setting other than a family and were not unnecessarily placed into a shelter.

DCF will continue to review relevant data to determine trends and variations across the state and assess the cause for persistent challenges with locating foster home placements for adolescents. This will include re-opening statewide recruitment efforts to target adolescent population as well as review of facilitation and engagement of existing homes that can accommodate this population.

¹ More detail on this initiative can be found in the New Jersey CFSR PIP.

Children with Special Needs

DCF identifies special needs youth entering through a five-level acuity system that supports required care and services in placement. Acuity Level 1 indicates a well child, while progressively Acuity Level 4 identifies a child with an active acute and / or chronic illness that requires physician monitoring. This includes children with developmental delays, all children on psychotropic medications, and all infants as they require frequent monitoring of growth and development. Level 5 indicates a child with acute or chronic illness that is not stable and can lead to a life-threatening condition. As of January 4, 2021, there are 62 children statewide designated as having an Acuity Level 5. While this is a relatively small percent (2%) of the population of children in out of home placement, these children display the most need and require the most supportive services, thus the resource homes that care for these children will also require intense supportive services.

Figure 13

<i># of children <18 in OOH as of January 4, 2021</i>	3,537	
<i># of Children with Acuity Level 5</i>	62	2%

The objective of DCF is to consider the health care needs of all children by matching them with the willingness and capabilities of each family, including relatives. DCF is committed to reassessing the acuity level system, as well as developing and maintaining a pool of at least 30 highly skilled resource parents to meet the needs of youth with acute or chronic illnesses by 2022. DCF has increased the focus on recruiting new families who have a willingness/ability to care for a child with special health care needs. In October 2020, DCF extended communication to potential applicants by including individual letters which described the complex needs of children in care and requested potential applicants to respond with their willingness. Applicants were then invited to a virtual group engagement meeting during which they received information about the foster care process and additional information on the type of care required for children with complex medical needs. Through the efforts of this virtual recruitment activity, DCF is in the process of assessing an additional 20+ advanced skilled resource homes.

Specific Recruitment Strategies to Reach Out to All Parts of the Community

DCF will continue to emphasize and support recruitment activities in the communities where children reside by using data driven methods to create targeted recruitment plans that assist in determining geographic and subpopulation areas of need. This is accomplished by analyzing the following:

- Characteristics of children who enter placement including race, gender, and age
- Origins of children in placement by municipality

- Locations of current resource families by municipality
- Market Segmentation density maps

Market Segmentation is a tool designed for targeted recruitment that seeks to identify the lifestyle characteristics of households that are perceived to have common needs and interests with our existing licensed resource homes. Upon review of the lifestyle characteristics, strategies are developed to target and successfully recruit these households. Lifestyle characteristics are used to target advertising opportunities within local geographic areas and considered when updating recruitment materials and publications to ensure they are customer centered and reflective of the characteristics identified in the market segmentation tool.

Market Segmentation tools include census data that is updated every 10 years, so information does not frequently change. When the licensed resource family address information is uploaded into the system, an analysis is completed and data is provided on characteristics and strategies to best perform market segments, which informs recruitment strategies. Additionally, county-based density maps are provided to recruiters to compare origins of children in placement by municipality and locations of current resource families by municipality to assess needs geographically. Characteristics of children who enter placement including race, gender, and age are then used to drive the strategies in the geographical areas that are deemed areas of need.

DCF continues to partner with the Human Rights Campaign, All Children-All Families (HRC AC-AF), a nationwide recruitment initiative launched by the Human Rights Campaign's Family Project. This initiative was created to increase the number of qualified foster and adoptive families for children in care by educating the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) community about opportunities to be foster/adoptive parents for not only LGBTQI youth, , but for all adolescents in care. This is accomplished by educating and engaging the LGBTQI community about opportunities for foster and adoptive parenting and by improving the cultural competence among staff that recruit, develop, train and support resource families.

DCF became the first state child welfare agency to earn the Seal of Recognition by the HRC AC-AF Initiative. DCF maintains the HRC AC-AF Seal of Recognition for reaching all benchmarks of LGBTQI cultural competency and being fully welcoming of LGBTQI youth and families. DCF continues its efforts by committing to a seal reassessment that is conducted every three years. DCF is actively engaged through technical assistance in the HRC AC-AF 2021 Participation Cycle.

The COVID-19 emergency severely impacted the ability of the resource operations staff to safely host recruitment events in 2020. As such, recruitment was limited to ad campaigns with a focus on special populations in the beginning of the year until the suspension of all recruitment activities and applications in March of 2020. In addition, in-person field visits by resource staff and licensing staff were suspended

from March until July 2020. Priority focus upon return to field operations targeted presumptive kinship homes that had a child(ren) placed with them pre-licensure, pending kinship homes, and outstanding resource homes in pending status to complete their licensure.

Despite the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic presented, DCF was able to successfully license 583 resource homes to serve the specific target populations of children in 2020.

Figure 14

2020 Newly Licensed Non-Kin Resource Homes by Population Served n= 583	
Adolescents 13-17	70
Sibling Groups of at least 2 or more	224
Children with at least one special need	126
LGBTQI	28
Total Resource Homes	583

Over the past year, DCF continued to focus on the retention and support of the current pool of resource homes and the children placed with them to address needs during the COVID-19 emergency. Retention activities currently include the financial enhancement of higher board rates for homes which experience COVID-19, or encounter a Person Under Investigation (PUI) due to a COVID-19 exposure. Resource caregivers are also supplied with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when a child(ren) who test positive or are exposed to COVID-19 enters the home.

Due to the closure of statewide childcare centers and summer camps, a specialized COVID-19 babysitting rate was established to assist caregivers with childcare needs. In addition, technology assistance was provided to caregivers that needed a device such as a computer, tablet or smart phone to assist with remote learning and virtual visitation.

Care packages were provided to resource families that experienced COVID-19 illness but remained committed to the children in their care. In addition, care packages were also provided to families experiencing the loss of a loved one due to COVID-19. DCF is saddened to have lost several resource parents due to COVID-19.

Since the impact of the COVID-19 Emergency, DCF continues to explore virtual options for retention and recruitment activities.

Diverse Methods of Distributing General/Child Specific Recruitment Information

There is a great deal of critical information regarding the recruitment of foster and adoptive parenting which requires dissemination to the public. This, in addition to child specific information for waiting children, is delivered utilizing a variety of methods.

DCF uses its public website and social media sites to provide information on the status of resource and adoptive family recruitment, along with changes in policy and new initiatives. The website reflects both Spanish and English resources and adoption support services. In addition, the DCF public website provides up to date COVID-19 related information to resource and adoptive families. Blast emailing is also utilized to disseminate critical information to existing resource and adoptive families.

DCF maintains a contract with Embrella to assist with recruiting through a hotline inquiry process. While this process is suspended as of March of 2020, DCF is working with Embrella to reopen the hotline inquiry process to target specialized populations. DCF will also maintain on-going partnerships with religious organizations, non-profits, and local schools to assist with future resource and adoption recruitment.

Additional efforts to recruit foster and adoptive families occur through current resource parents, who volunteer to share their lived experiences with others through videos created by the DCF Office of Communications and Public Affairs. Resource parents will continue to be offered an honorarium, travel, and childcare reimbursement to participate in in-person recruitment events and training when safely feasible.

Finally, DCF supports a Youth Ambassador Initiative, which provides an opportunity for former youth in care to support the recruitment of resource and adoptive parents, specifically for the adolescent population.

The Youth Ambassador Program originated as a result of efforts to enhance recruitment and retention of resource parents. Providing youth opportunities to share their stories will break down some of the existing myths and offer resource parents insight into this population, as well as offering youth an avenue to advocate for themselves. As a result, the speaking program was born.

Speaking Program Goals

Empowering Youth to Educate the Public By:

1. Raising awareness about specific target populations of youth in care (with an emphasis on teens and sibling groups)
2. Partnering with youth to develop public speaking and leadership skills (strategic sharing training)
3. Addressing misconceptions about youth in foster care (speaking at PRIDE trainings, group engagements, recruitment events, or to DCF staff)

4. Advocating on behalf of current and former foster youth (DCF workgroups)

Primarily, Youth Ambassadors are college students or recent graduates who at one point in time received the New Jersey Foster Care Scholarship that is administered through Embrella. Ambassadors are also referred by Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) staff. Ambassadors are provided opportunities to potentially speak at PRIDE pre-service trainings, group engagements, recruitment events, or directly to DCF staff. Speakers are compensated up to \$100.00 for participating in an event.

Currently there are 21 trained Youth Ambassadors. Since 2018, Youth Ambassadors have participated in over 80 speaking events across the state, including previous resource family symposiums and statewide normalcy and prudent parenting workgroups. In 2020, the Youth Ambassadors participated in over 10 speaking events spanning several counties. The Youth Ambassadors also participated in virtual resource parent pre-service trainings and DCF leadership meetings. In addition, these Youth Ambassadors created recruitment videos focusing on the importance of kinship care that were presented to field staff and leadership statewide.

Resource and Adoptive Parent Accessibility to Licensing Process

DCF operates a state administered child welfare system with 46 local offices throughout 21 counties allowing for accessibility by prospective resource parents, adoptive parents, and all members of the community. The state administered system also maintains statewide policies and procedures to ensure that standards are applied equally². While the recruitment of resource and adoptive families is centralized in its oversight, each local office maintains select staff that are specific to the study, training, and support of foster and adoptive families. DCF has a single licensing process that studies and licenses families for both resource and adoption, ensuring a more comprehensive and timely process for families. This supports timely permanency for youth who are unable to be reunified and can achieve permanency through their unrelated resource or kin caretakers.

The structure of resource/adoptive parent recruitment is localized and community specific to ensure accessibility for all. When an inquiry is obtained, it is distributed to recruitment specialists that invite prospective resource and adoptive parents to group engagement events held in the community. These events provide an overview of DCF and the foster and adoptive parent home study and licensing processes. Upon completion of a group engagement event, the home study is initiated by a resource support staff servicing the community where the prospective parents reside. Upon licensure, the resource and adoptive family is supported and serviced by the same office in their community.

² Statewide policy, statutes and licensing standards can be viewed at: https://www.nj.gov/dcf/policy_manuals/Child%20Protection%20&%20Permanency_113B34A2-A559-4F81-8379-E7070B788D27_IV%20-%20Out%20of%20Home%20Placement.shtml and <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/providers/licensing/laws/index.html>

Resource and adoptive parent training classes are held in all 21 counties to support accessibility, and include Spanish speaking trainers, translated recruitment and training materials. The classes are held in the evenings and on weekends in consideration of working families. Currently these trainings are provided on a virtual platform. DCF will compensate for childcare and transportation when it is safe to resume in-person training opportunities. Each county receives further support through localized resource family peer support from Embrella, New Jersey's contracted resource and adoptive family support agency; KinConnect, New Jersey's Kinship Legal Guardianship Resource Clearinghouse; and NJARCH, New Jersey's Adoption Resource Clearinghouse.

Since the impact of the COVID-19 emergency, DCF continues to explore virtual options for Resource and Adoptive training classes.

Training Staff to Work with Diverse Communities

It is critical that staff understand cultural competence and humility to provide quality services to the diverse population of families that DCF serves and supports.

One of the core approaches to the DCF Vision is Race Equity. DCF recognizes that racial bias impacts families' circumstances and the ways in which public systems, such as those operated by the Department, interact with families. In consultation with a national expert, DCF has launched work to attend to the issues of racial inequity and bias in all areas of the Department, with the ultimate goal of promoting equitable treatment and outcomes for all NJ constituents.

Beginning May 2021, DCF will provide an introductory online four module Implicit Racial Bias in Child Protection called InSIGHT, by Center for the Study of the Social Policy and Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. This will be followed by expert led conversations that will provide an overview of root causes of racism and how these have led to disparities and poor outcomes for Black families and children of color. Additional examples of trainings available to staff specific to this need include the following:

Cultural Competency: Introduces staff to the concepts of cultural competence in the workplace and explores the impact of personal views and values regarding sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity in their role as child welfare advocates. Through activities, videos and group discussions, staff explore the roots of their biases and how these dynamics affect their working relationships.

Aligning Our Values: Designed to give staff the opportunity to use self-reflection to consider how their personal values impact their decision-making process with families. Also, staff will be able to consider the intersection of their personal values as they align or differ from social work core values, so they can consider more deeply the ethical decision-making process.

DCF will continue to assess this area of staff competence. DCF is committed to developing a comprehensive learning path for resource staff that will enhance their

ability to respond to diverse families in a manner that is effective, respectful and values their worth as partners in the work.

Addressing Linguistic Barriers

DCF employs an ethnically diverse staff that are readily available and able to communicate with families in their own language. However, given the great cultural and linguistic diversity of New Jersey residents, the Department is not always able to serve each family with a staff member who speaks the family's native language. To ensure cultural competence and communication, DCF contracts with interpreting and translation for in-person or telephonic services. The contracted services are sufficient and are continually assessed to ensure that they meet the needs of staff and families.

Non-Discriminatory Fee Structure

DCF has a non-discriminatory fee structure. No fees are incurred by families to become licensed as a foster or adoptive home. DCF assumes the cost for the home study process, including fingerprinting, criminal background checks and training. Other requirements of the licensing process are individually assessed and supported accordingly. DCF also allocates special environmental modification funding for kin and fictive kin placements to support licensure.

Timely Search for Adoptive Parents

Children are referred to the NJ Resource Adoption Exchange when a goal of select home adoption has been identified. The child is assigned to an exchange specialist by geographic area. The specialist reviews all documentation and enters pertinent information in a computerized database. This database assists the specialist in the selection process by matching criteria for the child with criteria for prospective adoptive homes. A list is obtained of prospective matches with CP&P resource families. If a child is legally free and there are no CP&P resource families, then a non-CP&P family will be sought nationwide. The home studies are reviewed, and families are contacted prior to sending the home studies to the child's Local Office adoption team to review. When a family is not easily identified, a child can be registered on the national exchange. The links to those websites are listed below:

<http://www.adoptuskids.org>
<https://www.adoptamericanetwork.org/>
<https://www.afamilyforeverychild.org/>
<https://www.state.nj.us/njfofosteradopt/adoption/>
<http://www.adopt.org>

Children are also featured on the DCF social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram.

Once a prospective adoptive family is selected, the adoption team meets with the family in their home for a Supervisory Interview. This meeting serves as DCF's legal obligation

to provide the family with full disclosure while discussing subsidy eligibility and the transitional visitation schedule.

In addition, DCF maintains a partnership and membership with the Adoption Exchange Association, which provides adoption recruitment, training, and profiling opportunities for legally free youth. DCF has enhanced abilities to recruit for adoptive families for youth with Select Home adoption goals through the membership with the Adoption Exchange Association. This membership offers the opportunity to profile waiting youth to other adoption agencies within the network of membership across the nation. These agencies have access to families with interest in providing permanency for youth with complex medical, social and emotional needs. Membership also affords professional development and networking opportunities for adoption recruitment staff regarding national recruitment trends and strategies.

DCF also maintains a partnership with the National Adoption Center of Delaware (Adoption Center) for recruitment of legally free children. Over the past number of years, DCF has worked to continually assess formal recruitment efforts. In partnership with the Adoption Center, DCF has developed strategies to evolve recruitment efforts into small, child focused, and family engagement events. A strong Child Specific Recruitment team structure has been formed and gathers bi-monthly to assess each event. The team formulates strategies for continued progress for individual adoption and permanency readiness for youth. This teaming structure is also utilized to develop formal recruitment that is youth sensitive and effective in securing permanent families.

DCF's Office of Adoption Operations also has a family "Connect to Adoption" program that identifies and engages licensed resource families with interest in adoption. This program connects resource families directly with their adoption exchange and child specific recruitment team. This has led to better engagement and preparedness of potential adoptive families.

Through the ongoing partnership with Adoption Center, legally free children are able to be profiled in various media outlets via print and online publications, and FM radio, which assist in locating adoptive homes. Children are also featured on the social media pages of Adoption Center. The partnership with NBC-10 for "Wednesday's Child" is on hold as a result of the COVID-19 emergency. However, the partnership with KYW radio has been expanded to allow for virtual interviews of the children and their recruiters in an interactive format, which are posted online in addition to receiving airtime on FM radio.

DCF has continued to host match and profiling events, both through the partnership with Adoption Center, and internally. Events have been adapted to comply with Department of Health's guidance, which includes social distancing and masking requirements. When in person events have not been possible, virtual events have occurred. In 2020, there were six in person events and four virtual events.

DCF has continued to accept inquiries from families interested in adopting our legally free children that are waiting. The exchange specialists engage these families in understanding the strengths and challenges of some of the waiting youth and assess the potential abilities and interests in providing these children permanency. These families are then referred to the Local Office Resource teams to begin the home study process. With Adoption Operations engaging these families prior to the home study being licensed, DCF is able to connect to the families individually and in group settings while they go through the licensing process. The goal of group engagement is to connect with the families, provide an overview of Adoption Operations, and to allow the families to build a network with each other.

DCF will continue coordinating with statewide recruitment staff to ensure consistent practice and strategic planning of daily recruitment work as well as the implementation of matching events, youth engagement and adoptive family support events annually.

New Jersey recognizes that while the recruitment of resource and adoptive parents is a priority, retention is necessary to maintain a robust pool of resources. As a result, New Jersey developed a statewide retention plan with the intent of improving and strengthening DCF's delivery of services and supports to resource parents as well as to strengthen partnerships with them³. The plan consists of the core value of understanding that each resource family's strengths and challenges are essential to meeting their needs and those of the children in their care. In addition, acknowledging that relationships with resource families that are mutually beneficial and lasting must be developed through open communication and inclusion in individualized planning for all children in their care. Resource families must be considered as valuable members of the team.

Adoption Call to Action

Aligned in the Department's recruitment and retention work, DCF continues to make progress on the strategies outlined in the DCF Adoption Call to Action Plan. As part of DCF's strategic, transformational goals as well as Goal 2 objectives of the NJ CFSP, DCF strives to preserve family connections by increasing the use of kinship care. Progress on this strategy is outlined in Goal 2, objective 5 and also includes the development of a KINConnections presentation to provide research-informed discussion on the benefits of kin/fictive kin connection and placement. This presentation discussion began in early 2020 with staff at all levels in DCF to promote organizational buy in. Due to the COVID-19 emergency, this in-person presentation was disrupted. DCF reinstated these presentations virtually in the fall of 2020 and completed them in early 2021.

DCF also began to review licensing standards to support policy and practice changes regarding barriers to completing kin home studies. This included the criminal history and child abuse history waiver policy. This policy was revised based on recommendations made to assist in processing kin homes/fictive kin homes in a timely way to support

³ <https://www.state.nj.us/njfofosteradopt/RetentionPlan.pdf>

family connections and promote permanency. Other policy standards are currently under review.

Included in the Adoption Call to Action plan are strategies to assist in improving permanency for children who have been in placement for 36 months or longer. Progress includes the utilization of family finding tools to enhance case mining for youth who are legally free with an adoption goal. Additionally, for those youth where routine case mining has not been successful, a larger child specific recruitment team is assigned to conduct an intensive case mining effort along with an exit meeting with casework staff to review findings and assign next steps. The adoption child specific recruitment team is also identifying youth earlier in their placement process - 18 months or more to focus the recruitment work, family finding and recruitment profiling to include the initiation of the “all in challenge”- a project aimed at targeted recruitment for a cohort of children in placement between 18-36 months.

The final strategy in the NJ Adoption Call to Action plan offers increasing support to Adoptive and Kinship families post permanency. During 2020, activities to support this strategy include exploration of transitioning youth that require clinician support in post adoption and KLG to the vast service array through the Children’s System of Care (CSOC); increasing knowledge of the CSOC system through highlighting referrals for support to the subsidy unit; and highlighting CSOC services on the NJ Adoption Referral Clearinghouse. In addition, DCF evaluated and assessed the PACS model of support, and is exploring and assessing various evidence-based models of clinical and kin/adoptive/KLG parenting support programming.

Continuous Quality Improvement

DCF must ensure that the needs of all resource families are met by continuously evaluating performance quality. The following strategies will be used towards this end:

- Maintain an active resource retention taskforce that includes licensed resource and adoptive families, youth formerly in care, and DCF field staff
- Disseminate and analyze an annual customer service survey to resource families to provide DCF with continuous feedback to identify trends and challenges
- Continue to create retention-based activities, such as sending resource families Mother’s Day and Father’s Day cards, to express gratitude for the critical role they play in the lives of children.
- Continue a quarterly newsletter that highlights key topics, events, and available supports for resource and adoptive families
- Continued evaluation of all aspects of resource and adoptive parent work, including, but not limited to, pre-service training curriculum and delivery, home study licensing tool, and licensing regulations
- Continue to provide Mobile Response Stabilization Services to all families, at the time of placement to allow for increased support

- Restructuring of CP&P Local Office resource units to create more specialized roles in an effort to better support both kin and non-kin providers

In summary, DCF recognizes the need to maintain a diligent recruitment and retention plan that is structured, planful, and fluid. DCF is committed to continued efforts to recruit and retain a robust pool of resource families to provide better outcomes for all children.